“Stress and the student teacher: How stress varies during the student teaching practica”

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Chapter 1: Introduction

 Every person in the world experiences stress at some point in his or her life; it is unavoidable and not limited to the education profession. Although, stress is common and universal, it is especially prevalent among teachers, specifically student teachers. Stress is a result of psychological and physiological responses of the body to the demands placed upon it. Miller and Fraser (2000) define stress in simple terms as an unpleasant emotional state, an imbalance between environmental demand and individual resources (142). It occurs when a person cannot, internally, meet the demands that are placed upon them by external forces. Selye (1956) describe stress as the nonspecific response of the body to any demand, whether it is caused by or results in, pleasant or unpleasant conditions (74).

 There are two categories of stress felt by human beings, eustress, which is recognized as beneficial and distress, which is known to be harmful to the person experiencing it. For student teachers, eustress can possibly motivate him or her to create great lessons that will allow for high quality teaching and learning for the students and student teacher. It can also push a person to accomplish what they felt unable to achieve had they not been faced with the eustress’ beneficial stressful motivation. Stress can also be debilitating, as is the case when someone is experiencing distress. Distress can prevent the student teacher from reaching goals, completing assignments, working cooperatively with peers, and mentors, or possibly, as severe as, not completing their teaching program. The harm that results from distress seriously inhibits the person living with it from accomplishing what they might have, if it were absent from their being.

 For student teachers some sources of stress include concerns associated with feelings of competency in classroom assignments and management, relationships with mentor teachers, peers and students, and expectations of abilities and performance, to name a few. The level of stress experienced by individual student teachers will vary depending upon an individual’s circumstances. The variables among students teachers such as degree program, whether it be undergraduate or a masters program, gender, area of teaching authorization and length of time spent in the student teaching practicum experience can impact the stress experienced by the individual student teacher.

 Student teachers face situations where they are constantly questioning their abilities, their position in their practicum classrooms, their relationships with students, supervisors, and cooperating teachers, all the while balancing the requirements of their college courses and personal lives. This stress can lead many students to doubt their decision to become a teacher and work in the education field. It can also prevent the student teacher from producing quality work, which could negatively affect student performance in their practicum placement. The recognized anxieties associated with daily teaching responsibilities often reach such levels that student teachers find it difficult to cope (Bowers, Eicher, & Sacks, 1983).

 Student teachers experience maximum stress levels at different times in their teaching practicum. Depending upon the student teacher, their individual circumstances and the demands placed upon them, the anxiety felt when beginning the teaching practicum may produce higher stress levels for some as compared to further along in their practicum experience, say when they are solo teaching.

 There are a variety of factors that could change throughout the student teaching practicum that may affect the stress levels felt by certain groups or all student teachers as a whole. The experience gained from practicing teaching could ease the anxieties experienced, which could positively affect stress levels by reducing them. If stress level were to decrease confidence in the student teachers’ abilities, knowledge and relationships, and the ability to balance the demands place upon them may progress to higher levels.

 Tools that can help the student teacher cope with and learn from stress should be taught in teacher education college courses. Student teachers should also be provided with a network of support to assist them in coping with any stress experienced as they progress through their student teaching practica. Stress will not disappear from the lives of student teachers; in fact, it may increase as more demands are placed upon the education system in the United States that they will need to work to meet those expectations. Current college teacher education programs pay little attention to the psychological readiness of student teachers (Bowers, Eicher, & Sacks, 1983). Providing more professional development in this area could positively affect the teaching profession as better-prepared teachers enter the work force.

 Debilitating stress experienced during the student teaching practica can possibly lead student teachers to produce a poorer quality of work, maintain unrealistic beliefs about the teaching profession, lower individual self-esteem and self-confidence, and possibly, not complete their education degree programs. Unless this stress is turned into a positive motivator for the student teacher, negative consequences will result for the student teacher and the effects of this may be far-reaching. Motivating stress can produce higher quality work and be a driving force behind why some teachers are so successful. Shifting negative stress into positive stress is necessary for many student teachers if they are to turn their teaching practicum into a high quality experience overall. Overall, Stress can prevent student teachers from accomplishing their goals but it can also push them to complete what they originally set as their goals.

 Due to the effects stress can have on student teachers, it is important to identify at what points during their teaching practicum and what variables may influence the stress levels experienced by these practicum students. Providing student teachers with tools to help them cope, transform, and alleviate some of this stress will help them be successful during their practice teaching. It would also be beneficial for the student teacher to know the times when they felt more stress for their own professional development in learning how to cope with these stressors as their career moves forward. The purpose of this study is to examine how stress varies during student teachingpractica.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

 The purpose of this study is to examine how stress varies during student teachingpractica. Research into the field of student teacher stressreminds educators of the importance of knowing about stress and how it affects preservice teachers as they make the transition from student to professional. According to Gmelch (1981), if one does not alleviate some stressors and learn to cope, consequences may arise in the form of serious mental or physical illness. These consequences may prevent those who are training for the teaching profession from entering it all together. In fact, the recognized anxieties associated with daily teaching responsibilities often reach such levels that student teachers find it difficult to cope (Bowers, Eicher, & Sacks, 1983).

 Gardner and Leak (1994) define teaching anxiety as anxiety that teachers experience in relation to teaching activities including the preparation and execution of classroom activities. Yetkin (2003) goes further to explain that stress experienced by student teachers includes stress associated with supervisor and cooperating teacher opinions. Teachers already accustomed to the classroom and school environments share some stress similarities to student teachers but not all. According to Sinclair & Nicol (1981), pre-service teachers are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of stress because of their lack of experience as well as their unclear perception of their own status and the possibility of conflicting advice and expectations.

 Stress experienced by student teachers often begins before they even enter the practicum classrooms. In the weeks preceding the practicum placement, participants in a study by Tardif (1985) expressed feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about the forthcoming practicum experience. Bowers, Eicher, & Sacks (1983) report that student teachers experience high levels of anxiety before student teaching even begins**.** As a result of stress being felt prior to the commencement of the student teaching practicum, attention can be placed on helping student teachers transition into the practicum classroom. Finally, Thompson (1963) found that more anxieties precede student teaching than actually occur during the experience. This data reveals that there may be some conflict between real and perceived stress as experienced by students teacher.

 Student teacher reported stress levels vary depending upon the circumstances of the student teaching experience for each individual. Kaunitz, Spokane, Lissitz, & Strein (1986) found that graduate and undergraduate students coped differently according to the nature of the stressful situation experienced. The difference between gender, and area of authorization can also be evaluated to reveal more information into how circumstance affects the stress experienced by different student teachers.

 In many research studies, it was found that there was a significant reduction in stress reported by student teachers from the first to the second teaching practicum. Murray-Harvey, Slee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield & Russell (1999) found that there was a significant reduction in the stress from the first to second practicum which they believe to be the result of an established relationship between the student teacher and their observers. A few weeks of exposure to the actual classroom setting and instructional preparation was sufficient to reduce student teaching anxiety (Morton, Vesco, Williams, & Awender, 1997). Yetkin also explains that teachers report feeling less stress as the practicum progresses since they become clearer in their expectations and their own effectiveness as teachers (2003).

 There are, however, contradictory studies that point to there being no change in stress levels from the first teaching practicum to the second. Capel (1997) found that student teachers remained overall moderately anxious for both their first and second teaching practica. Silvernail and Costello (1983) revealed that during a 15-week student teaching practica there were no changes in anxiety levels or teaching concerns.

 Knowing the areas of practice teaching that produce the highest levels of student teacher stress is valuable information for student teachers, university supervisors and cooperating teachers so that those stressors can be addressed during the teaching pracitca. Research by Bowers, Eicher, & Sacks (1983) found two constructs produced the highest levels of anxiety in their study of 246 pre-student teaching college students. These areas are “teacher role” and “relationship to authority figures”. Inconsistencies in evaluations, varying expectations of student performance, conformity between teachers, and quality of feedback given to student teachers were identified by MacDonald (1993) as four main areas of student teacher stress. Hart established four main constructs around which student teachers experience the most stress that are recurrent throughout the literature. These constructs are student and professional concerns anxiety, evaluation anxiety, class control anxiety, and student teaching requirements anxiety (Hart, 1987).

Relationships with cooperating teachers, and university supervisors ranked among the highest cause of student teacher stress in almost all research. Murray-Harvey, SLee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield & Russell (1999)found a significant relationship between student teachers’ fear of failing the practicum and relationship with their cooperating teacher or university supervisor who were completing assessments of their performance. Their research also revealed that this relationship was also found to be of critical importance for student success in the student teaching practicum. Abernathy, Manera and Wright (1985)found that out of 13 stress causing factors, cooperating teachers and student teachers matched exactly on six of the 13 for what causes the most stress for student teachers. Implying that cooperating teachers recognize areas of high stress for student teachers under their supervision. MacDonald (1992) reports that student teachers felt a good relationship with the cooperating teacher was essential during the field experience.

 Establishing a role in a classroom is essential for managing and maintaining low stress levels resulting in a successful student teaching experience. Grant (1992) explains that student teachings may experience more stress than an experienced teachers because they are working in someone else’s classroom and trying to establish their own reputation. MacDonald’s (1993) research with a focus group of student teachers uncovered that student teachers were never certain what their role in the cooperating teacher’s classroom was and that every cooperating teacher expected different things of them. This can leaves student teacher’s guessing about what exactly their role is in their practica classrooms. MacDonald (1993) also found that voicing their concerns with their cooperating teachers or university supervisors did little to ease the stress felt by student teachers.

 Often student teachers conform to the structure and practices already set up in the classroom whether they agreed with them or not (Jelinek, 1986; MacDonald, 1992; Tardiff, 1985). Stress is a result of not being able to practice their own philosophies and teaching style during their student teaching practicum. Tardiff (1985) writes that student teachers attempt to avoid conflict in their relationships with cooperating teachers and students. MacDonald (1993) found that student teachers often worried that their evaluations would suffer if they did not teach like and carry out the already established routines of the cooperating teacher.

 Combining stress experienced as a result of the relationship with a cooperating teacher and/or university supervisor, student teachers found assessment or evaluation stress to be high and possibly detrimental to the student teachers success. Assessment completed by the university supervisors or cooperating teachers was found to be the highest cause of stress for student teachers in a study by Miller and Fraser (2000). Evaluation anxiety was paramount for student teachers (Morton, Vesco, Williams, & Awender, 1997). Capel (1997), using the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale, showed that student teachers were most anxious about being observed, evaluated and assessed by their cooperating teacher and university supervisors. Miller and Fraser (2000) found during their interviews of student teachers that assessment of their teaching skills was taken very personally as an a personal criticism of them as individuals.

 Student teachers also reported a lack of time for communication with the cooperating teachers or university supervisor as a source of anxiety that did not diminish over the course of the teaching practicum (MacDonald, 1993). The findings of the study completed by MacDonald (1993) reveal the inconsistencies of the student teaching practica. These inconsistencies resulted in high levels of stress and left student teachers feeling vulnerable.

 Student teachers reported during a focus group interview that cooperating teachers lacked in being able to provide constructive criticism, discussions and analysis of teaching practices (MacDonald, 1993). MacDonald (1993) found that student teachers that received more feedback from their cooperating teacher had lower stress levels and felt more comfortable and confident during their practica. The use of this feedback and the investment of time and attention on the part of the cooperating teacher and/or university supervisor could be beneficial to the success of the student teacher.

 A slight increase in anxiety levels was reported for student teachers over the course of their practicum experience in the teaching construct of classroom management (Morton, Vesco, Williams, & Awender, 1997). Morton, Vesco, Williams and Awender (1997) believe that anxiety in this area of teaching needs to be addressed because it is a primary cause for why teachers leave the profession. Hart (1987) found that student teachers anxieties correlated positively with pupil disruption levels.

 Stress reactions in student teachers then, are detrimental to individual teachers, pupils, and to the institutions in which they work (Kaunitz, Spokane, Lissitz, & Strein, 1986). In some cases, student teacher anxiety may be tied to various negative consequences including a reported positive correlation between teacher anxiety and student anxiety (Doyal and Forsyth, 1973).

 Miller and Fraser (2000) found that student teachers often put their own personal lives on hold while they are completing the student teaching practica. In their research, students noted that they often felt overwhelmed with the workload of college courses and completing their student teaching (Miller and Fraser, 2000). This may contribute to the different ways in which student teachers, whether graduate or undergraduate, male or female, etc. address the affects that stress has on their success in the teaching program. Miller and Fraser (2000) believe that teacher educators must not forget that student teachers are living a sort of dual life with two separate roles, a college student and a student teacher, that both contribute greatly to the stress experienced by student teachers.

 According to MacDonald (1992), student teachers find the student teaching practica to be a valuable experience but it is also reported to be the most stressful part of the teacher education program. In fact, research points out that high levels of anxiety about teaching would have a detrimental effect upon the transition of teacher candidates into the profession (Pigge & Marso,1991). Research also indicates that teaching anxiety negatively affects teachers’ performance, their classroom management behaviors, their persistence, responsibility, and commitment of students’ learning and achievement (Yetkin, 2003). The effect of anxiety or stress on teacher performance was also recognized byBernstein (1983) who wrote that teaching anxiety may contribute to the development of lifelong teaching behaviors that are inappropriate, ineffective, and detrimental to one’s health. Bowers, Eicher, & Sacks (1983) believe that there is not enough emphasis in teacher education programs on preparing student teachers to be psychologically ready for teaching and stress. Student teaching stress, perceived or real, needs to be addressed so that student teachers leaving the relative security of a college classroom for the uncertainty of a cooperating teachers classroom are prepared for what they will be faced with as they begin this journey into the teaching profession.

Chapter 3: Methods

 The purpose of this study is to examine how stress varies during student teaching practica. The participants in this study were undergraduate education majors andMasters of Arts in Teaching graduate students who were completing their teacher education program at the University of Portland. In August 2009, which marked the start of this study, the students were just beginning their student teaching practica with their secondary level of authorization for their future teaching licenses. They were followed throughout the student teaching practicum year of approximately eight months. In December 2009, the student teachers began their second practicum placement or their primary level of authorization for their teaching license.

 Specifically, there are 58 participants in this study composed of 12 males and 44 females, 27 Masters of Arts in Teaching and 31 undergraduate students. Areas of authorization for future licensing purposes and for purposes of student teaching placement are separated into four different categories; early childhood, elementary, middle school and high school. For the first semester area of authorization, students were organized as 16 early childhood, 21 elementary, 19 middle school, and 2 high school. For the second semester or primary level of authorization, the students were divided 14 early childhood, 24 elementary, 5 middle school and 14 high school and 1 unreported. The students were chosen as a sample of convenience because they were completing their teacher education program at the time this study was conducted.

 For this study, the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale or STAS was used to collect data. The data was gathered on four separate occasions within a common college course that the student teacher participants were taking as a part of their degree program. Beginning in August, the four iterations of the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale took place at the start and finish of each of the two university semesters, fall and spring. The four separate administrations of the survey were chosen to reflect different lengths of time spent in the student teaching practica. One administration took place in August or early September, at the start of their teaching practica. The next administration took place approximately 8 weeks later in November. The third administration took place in January, with the final administration taking place in April at the end of their student teaching experience.

 For each iteration of the instrument, the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale instructions were delivered to the participants at the start of their class. There was no specific amount of time given for the participants to complete the surveys but all were returned within the class period. The surveys were coded for identification following the first administration to maintain confidentiality. Participants were informed at the start of each survey administration that the survey results were anonymous and that all data reported would be done with confidentiality. Participants were also reminded of the voluntary nature of the study and were invited to participate it they chose. Participants were given the instructions to complete first the demographic data collection and then proceed onto the 26 survey questions that were focused on the anxiety perceived at that point in their student teaching practicum.

 The Student Teaching Anxiety Scale (Hart, 1987) measures four factors in student teaching anxiety. Using the Spearman-Brown formula, Hart (1987) found the reliability coefficient to be .97. The 26 questions of the survey are focused on four teaching constructs: evaluation anxiety, class control anxiety, teaching practice anxiety, and pupil and professional concerns anxiety. The questions included in the instrument to measure stress in these four areas of student teaching are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.  | I am anxious about how to give each child the attention he/she needs without neglecting others. |
| 2. | I am anxious about being observed by my university supervisor. |
| 3. | I am anxious about setting work at the right level for the children. |
| 4. | I am anxious about classroom management. |
| 5. | I am anxious about whether or not my performance will be satisfactory from the point of view of my cooperating teacher. |
| 6. | I am anxious about how the practice teaching will go in my university supervisor’s eyes. |
| 7. | I am anxious about how helpful members of my placement school staff will be. |
| 8. | I am anxious about whether or not my lesson plans will be adequate. |
| 9. | I am anxious about possible problems in the classroom with individualdisruptivechildren. |
| 10. | I am anxious about completing lesson plans in the required format. |
| 11. | I am anxious about getting along with the school staff including my cooperating teacher. |
| 12. | I am anxious about what my university supervisor will expect. |
| 13. | I am anxious about incidents of misbehavior in class. |
| 14. | I am anxious about how the university supervisor will react to one or more unsuccessful lessons if they should occur. |
| 15. | I am anxious about whether or not I will cover the material adequately. |
| 16. | I am anxious about whether the principal will be happy with my work. |
| 17. | I am anxious about controlling the noise level in the class. |
| 18. | I am anxious about how the cooperating teacher will react to one or more unsuccessful lessons if they should occur. |
| 19. | I am anxious about selecting suitable lesson content. |
| 20. | I am anxious about the delivery of my lessons. |
| 21. | I am anxious about cooperation with the school staff. |
| 22. | I am anxious about how to handle defiance from a child. |
| 23. | I am anxious about preparation. |
| 24. | I am anxious about assessment by my university supervisor. |
| 25. | I am anxious about getting all the paperwork done in time. |
| 26. | I am anxious about the lesson my university supervisor will observe. |

 Throughout the literature, stress and anxiety are used often to explain the same phenomena. Finding a clarifying statement in the literature to explain why some have chosen to use stress, anxiety or both stress and anxiety in their research was not accomplished despite extreme effort.

 For this study, self-reported stress levels for student teachers are the primary focus. However, to better quantify the stress levels of student teachers, a modified version of the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale (STAS) was used (Hart, 1987). The first modification made was to alter the wording of the questions to fit the American education system. The second modification was the use of a four-point Likert scale instead of the original seven-point scale. This was done to force participants into choosing an answer that best fit their current anxiety or stress levels at that point in their student teaching. The four-point Likert scale was labeled from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The higher the participant score, the higher their level of anxiety felt at that point in their student teaching practicum.

 All the data collected for each of the four iterations of the instrument was then entered into a Microsoft Excel workbook for analysis. The date will be analyzed first by computing a mean score and standard deviation reporting the current anxiety or stress levels for each student teacher for each of the four iterations of the STAS. The individual mean scores will then be compiled to compute a full mean score and standard deviation which can then be compared to the full mean scores and standard deviations for each administration of the STAS.

 To determine statistical significance, a t-test of independent means will be used to compute statistical significance of the full mean scores for gender and education program differences as a whole and for each iteration. An ANOVA will be used to compare for significance the four group mean scores for each iteration of the instrument, area of authorization for each iteration of the instrument and the four instrument construct for each iteration of the STAS. Following the analysis, and if statistical significance is proven, post-hoc tests will be conducted to determine the exact relationship of the data. Finally, the data will be analyzed and interpreted for any implications it may have for student teachers and the teaching profession as a whole.

Chapter 4: Results

 There were a total of 58 participants in this study on stress levels experienced during the student teaching practica. The Student Teacher Anxiety Scale, STAS, took approximately 10 minutes for each iteration of the survey for the participants to complete the 26 questions and demographic data. The means and standard deviations reported are in table 1 below.

Table 1

*ANOVA for four iterations of Student Teaching Anxiety Scale*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  | ANOVA Comparisons |
| Iteration | *n* | Mean | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 58 | 2.85 | .53 |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | 58 | 2.31 | .49 | .000 |  |  |  |
| 3 | 58 | 2.46 | .45 | .000 | .085 |  |  |
| 4 | 58 | 1.89 | .57 | .000 | .000 | .000 |  |

ANOVA significance *p* = .000.

 The data results indicate a significant difference among the stress levels reported on the STAS. Further analysis using post-hoc tests point to a significant difference in stress levels between all survey iterations except for one. There was not a significant difference between the scores reported for survey iteration 2 and 3.

 Next the data was analyzed using an independent t-test to determine stress levels experienced by males and females as compared to the full mean. This data is described in table 2.

Table 2

*Independent t-test of gender on full mean for the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Gender | N | Mean | SD |
| Male | 52 | 2.24\* | .60 |
| Female | 180 | 2.42\* | .61 |

\*p<.05.

 The independent t-test results reveal a significant difference between male and female respondents and their overall stress levels for all four iterations of the STAS. In table 3, the data is analyzed more in-depth by performing a t-test of independent means for each of the four iterations of the STAS independently by gender.

Table 3

*Independent t-test of gender on full mean for four iterations of Student Teaching Anxiety Scale*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Gender |  |
| Test Iteration | Male |  | Female |  |
|  | *N* | Mean | *SD* |  | *N* | Mean | *SD* | *p* |
| 1 | 13 | 2.48 | .63 |  | 45 | 2.96 | .44 | .003 |
| 2 | 13 | 2.18 | .47 |  | 45 | 2.35 | .50 | .277 |
| 3 | 13 | 2.31 | .54 |  | 45 | 2.50 | .42 | .200 |
| 4 | 13 | 1.92 | .67 |  | 45 | 1.88 | .55 | .804 |

 The data here revels that a significant difference was present between male and female respondents for only the first iteration of the STAS with p<.05. None of the other iterations reveal a significant difference in stress levels between males and females. In table 4, a t-test of independent means was run to determine the relationship between the full mean score and the different degree programs.

Table 4

*Independent t-test of degree program on full mean for the Student Teacher Anxiety Scale*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Degree Program | N | Mean | SD |
| Masters of Arts in Teacher | 112 | 2.44 | .61 |
| Undergraduate | 120 | 2.32 | .62 |

 The results of this t-test are not significantly different with a p value of .149. Again, in the next table, the data was separated by degree program for each iteration of the STAS. Then a t-test of independent means was used to analyze the data to determine if there was a significant difference among any of the data for degree program and stress levels throughout the study.

Table 5

*Independent t-test of degree program on full mean for four iterations of Student Teaching Anxiety Scale*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Degree Program |  |
| Test Iteration | Masters of Arts in Teaching |  | Undergraduate |  |
|  | *n* | Mean | *SD* |  | *n* | Mean | *SD* | *p* |
| 1 | 28 | 2.99 | .37 |  | 30 | 2.72 | .62 | .047 |
| 2 | 28 | 2.29 | .49 |  | 30 | 2.32 | .51 | .864 |
| 3 | 28 | 2.49 | .51 |  | 30 | 2.43 | .38 | .662 |
| 4 | 28 | 1.97 | .56 |  | 30 | 1.81 | .58 | .281 |

 There was a significant difference reported for only the first iteration of the STAS with p<.05. All other iterations of the survey analyzed by degree program report no significant difference in perceived stress levels.

The ANOVA data for level of authorization for each iteration of the STAS reveals that there are no significant differences among the respondents. In table **7**, the data for the ANOVA for construct 1, evaluation anxiety, for all four iterations of the STAS is shown.

Table 6

*ANOVA for four iterations of STAS Construct 1: Evaluation Anxiety*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  | ANOVA Comparisons |
| Iteration | *n* | Mean | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 58 | 29.45 | 6.41 |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | 58 | 22.25 | 5.98 | .000 |  |  |  |
| 3 | 58 | 24.29 | 5.44 | .000 | .058 |  |  |
| 4 | 58 | 18.24 | 6.36 | .000 | .001 | .000 |  |

ANOVA significance *p* = .000.

There is statistical significance for the ANOVA overall. Using post-hoc analysis, the data shows no statistical significance for construct 1 between iterations 2 and 3 of the STAS. Again, using an ANOVA, the data for construct 2, pupil and professional concerns anxiety, for all four iterations of the STAS is represented below.

Table 7

*ANOVA for four iterations of STAS Construct 2: Pupil and professional concerns anxiety*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  | ANOVA Comparisons |
| Iteration | *n* | Mean | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 58 | 18.95 | 3.57 |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | 58 | 16.05 | 3.59 | .000 |  |  |  |
| 3 | 58 | 17.01 | 3.35 | .003 | .137 |  |  |
| 4 | 58 | 13.41 | 4.29 | .000 | .000 | .000 |  |

ANOVA significance *p* = .000.

 There is statistical significance present when the data is analyzed using the ANOVA. Further post-hoc analysis shows that there is no statistical significance between iterations 2 and 3 for STAS construct 2 while there is significance for all other iterations of the STAS for this construct. Table 9 shows the ANOVA data for construct 3, class control anxiety, for all four iterations of the STAS.

Table 8

*ANOVA for four iterations of STAS Construct 3: Class control anxiety*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  | ANOVA Comparisons |
| Iteration | *n* | Mean | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 58 | 17.31 | 3.43 |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | 58 | 15.41 | 3.25 | .003 |  |  |  |
| 3 | 58 | 16.81 | 3.25 | .422 | .022 |  |  |
| 4 | 58 | 12.78 | 3.74 | .000 | .000 | .000 |  |

ANOVA significance *p* = .000.

The data from the ANOVA reveals that there is statistical significance, or that the stress experienced by the student teachers did not occur by chance, for all of the iterations of the STAS for construct 3 except for between iterations 1 and 3. The following table shows the ANOVA results for the final construct, construct 4, teaching practice requirements anxiety for all four iterations of the STAS.

Table 9

*ANOVA for four iterations of STAS Construct 4: Teaching practice requirements anxiety*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  | ANOVA Comparisons |
| Iteration | *n* | Mean | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 58 | 13.93 | 2.75 |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | 58 | 11.24 | 2.75 | .000 |  |  |  |
| 3 | 58 | 11.16 | 2.83 | .000 | .894 |  |  |
| 4 | 58 | 8.72 | 3.04 | .000 | .000 | .000 |  |

ANOVA significance *p* = .000.

The data reveals statistical significance is present, overall, for all four iterations of the STAS for construct 4. Although, between iterations 2 and 3 there is no statistical significance when analyzed with post-hoc tests following the ANOVA.

Chapter 5: Discussion/Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine stress levels in student teachers during their student teaching practica. The data reveals high levels of stress experienced by all student teachers during the first practicum placement regardless of gender, or degree program.As the practicum experience progresses for student teachers, stress levels become similar and not significantly different for any specific demographic. Overall, stress levels are affected by time and experience for all student teachers. They are more stressed at the start of both placements and less stressed at the end of the placements, especially at the end of the practica experience.

Essentially, what the student teachers were encountering that resulted in a reduction of self-report stress levels was time and experience within the practicum placement. The data suggests that as time progresses and the student teacher gains confidence and experience their stress levels are reduced. When comparing the full mean score across the four iterations of the STAS, significant differences were reported for all iterations of the survey except for when the student teachers moved from their first placement, in their secondary authorization level, to their second placement, their primary level of authorization or the second and third iterations of the STAS. Their stress levels increased between the end of the first and beginning of the second placement. The data reveals that their stress levels were still not as high as they were when they began the student teaching experience, leading to the conclusion that although they were stressed at that point in their student teaching it was not as significant as when they began the teaching practica.

When looking at the data on gender as compared to the full mean score, it is evident that gender does significantly impact perceived stress levels overall. When examined further by separate iteration of the STAS, gender only significantly impacts stress levels at the first iteration. This leads me to believe that while, overall, females appear to experience more stress it is only statistically significant at the start of the teaching practica. Interestingly, females experience more stressful feelings than males at the start of the student teaching experience but are less stressed than males for the final iteration. If one looks at the mean scores for gender differences, females report higher levels of stress for the first three iterations but lower levels for the four. Overall, the difference in self-reported stress levels for males and females during the student teaching practica are different but only significantly different for the first iteration.

The t-test of independent means for degree program showed no significant difference overall for self-reported stress levels for undergraduate education students and Masters of Arts in teaching (MAT) students. When examined for significant difference for each iteration of the STAS by degree program, the only significant difference was present in the first iteration. The reported stress levels for MAT students were significantly different for the first iteration of the STAS. This leads me to conclude that MAT students were experiencing higher levels of stress at the start of the student teaching practica than undergraduate students. Knowledge of the two programs leads me to conclude that there could be several reasons behind this difference including, for example, the writing of a capstone project, and the length of time spent away from a university course for MAT students. For the next three iterations of the STAS, stress levels reported by undergraduate and MAT students were similar and not significantly different meaning that the difference in degree program did not impact their stress levels.

When looking at the difference in stress for all students using an ANOVA, it was revealed that there were no statistically significant differences among the students by level of authorization across the four iterations of the STAS. If we look at the actual mean scores, though, we see higher levels of stress being reported for the first iteration compared to the other three iterations. The trend of increasing stress levels at the start of the second placement was also present in this data, although they were less than when the practica placements began. This may be attributed to the fact that the first placement is a secondary level of authorization and therefore, not their primary focus for future career plans or overall interest. All in all, students in all levels of authorization experienced levels of stress that were high at the start of their placements and reduced at the close, which is what I expected to find when I began this study.

When looking at the results for the four separate constructs for all four iterations, it is clear that there is significant differences overall, meaning that time, or other factors most likely affect the stress levels reported by the respondents for all four constructs of the STAS. For construct 1, there are significant differences between all iterations except for between iteration 2 and 3, which may be attributed to the fact that student teachers began their second placement at the time of iteration 3. The same is true for construct 2 and 4. Interestingly, construct 3, class control anxiety, showed significant differences between all iterations except for between iteration 1 and 3. Construct 3 may differ from all other constructs because of the introduction of a new class with its own unique control issues and a different management style established by the new cooperating teacher with which the student teacher needs to gain familiarity.

The reliability coefficient provided by Hart (1987) for the STAS at the time of its creation was .97 using the Spearman-Brown formula. When the internal consistency was measured for this particular study, the measures of reliability were high for all four iterations of the STAS (Chronbach Alpha >.92). The numbers for the reliability of the instrument were comparable to what the original author, Hart (1987), found and were similar to what other researchers found when using the same instrument for the purposes of their studies (Morton, Vesco, Williams, & Awender, 1997, Yetkin, 2003).

My overall findings were similar to what I discovered throughout the literature. Morton, Vesco, Williams, & Awender, (1997), using the STAS, also found no statistical difference between level of authorization and stress levels, which is congruent with my findings. They also found, similar to my results, that female students experience higher reported stress levels than their male counterparts. Hourcade, Parette, & McCormack, (1988) found no significant difference between elementary and secondary student teachers and reported stress levels. Many studies found that overall stress associated with the second placement was lower than with the first (Murray-Harvey, SLee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield & Russell, 1999, Morton, Vesco, Williams, & Awender, 1997, Thompson, 1963, & Yetkin, 2003). My results are also aligned with Capel (1997) who wrote that student teachers maintain anxiety throughout the entire student teaching experience. Stress levels were reported for all iterations of the STAS in this study.

There are several ways this study was limited. First, the sample size could have included more of the student teachers participants. The absences of some of the student teachers on the day of the STAS survey and/or the decision not to participate in the study lowered the number of responses. Another limitation was any circumstances or external influences, not associated with student teaching, experienced by student teachers that may have affected the stress levels they reported on the day of the survey. There are also student teachers, who, between their first and second placements, enter a student teaching practicum for an additional teaching endorsement in reading, ESOL or special education. The stress levels of these student teachers are most likely affected by this experience in practice teaching whether positively or negatively would need to be examined further.

The database created for the purposes of running the statistical analysis was not statistically correct. Also, the data sound have been analyzed by the constructs that the instrument was created around in addition to overall stress, stress associated with gender differences, degree program differences and level of authorization differences. Further analysis of the data could be performed to glean more meaning about the stress levels reported by student teachers during their student teaching practica experience.

If this study were to be repeated it would be interesting for student teachers to expand upon their stressful experience using a qualitative study. A qualitative study would provide reasoning behind the reported stress levels and may eliminate any external influences on stress reported for the student teaching practicum. If done quantitatively, it would be interesting if data could be collected at regular intervals more often during the practica to see exactly when students teacher are experiencing the shifts in stress levels; meaning are they more stressed at times when writing and compiling work samples, collecting data for their capstone project, or transitioning to an endorsement level practicum. There are more questions that can be asked of student teachers about their stress levels, and how they are influenced, vary, morph or diminish.

It is evident that student teachers, regardless of gender, degree program or levels of authorization, experience stress. More importantly, higher levels of stress at the start of the student teaching practica are reported. As educators, it is important to learn ways to cope with the stress we experience so that it does not become debilitating. The possibility that capable teachers may leave the profession due to a stressful student teaching experience will damage the professional education community by adversely affecting teachers who may have positively impacted their field. There should be continued effort in teacher education programs to assist student teachers in learning to manage stress and turn it into a motivator as suggested by many researchers (Hourcade, Parette, & McCormack, 1988, Bowers, Eicher, & Sacks, 1983).

Stress can be motivating and it can have the opposite effect of preventing student teachers from achieving their degree and teaching license. It is important then, to aid these preservice teachers when they are experiencing their highest levels of stress. By conducting studies that examine whom and when they are more likely to experience higher levels of stress during the student teaching practica, educators can provide the necessary support to keep student teachers focused and feeling capable of the tasks ahead of them. One possibility is the establishment of a mentor, who does not have the duty of observing and critiquing the student teacher, to work with the student teacher as they work their way through their practica.

From this study, we learned that all student teachers experience stress, highest at the start of the student teaching practica and diminishing as they gain experience and confidence in their chosen path. MacDonald (1993) wrote that addressing the concerns identified by student teachers surrounding stress could result in a practicum experience, which is more meaningful and relevant. We also learned that, while all student teachers experience some stress, females and MAT students tend to be more stressed at the beginning of their first student teaching experience. This increase in stress levels for these two demographic groups is not statistically present as the practica experience progresses. I believe that knowing this information will guide those who are assisting these preservice teachers as they fulfill their hopes of becoming a teacher.

It is disheartening to think that stress, resulting from the experience of student teaching could prevent a capable and knowledgeable person from becoming a teacher. Sorenson & Halpert (1968) found that teaching candidates who reported the most discomfort at the end of their student teaching were more likely to report that they were planning on not becoming teachers. As an education community, we need to support student teachers, especially as they begin their practica, to manage stressful feelings and recognize the motivation that can be a result of feeling stress. We will have better teachers in the education profession when they are prepared to meet all the teaching demands placed upon them.

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